INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT M. MONTAGUE

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Montague's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape l of 2, Side 1

G: What was Hop Tac, where were you, and what was your role in that operation?

M: Well, at the time of Hop Tac, I was the special assistant to COMUSMACV [Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] and to General [William] Westmoreland. I was also, as I told you before, serving as the pacification director in the office of the J-3, and the J-3 at that time was General William E. DePuy, and General DePuy was quite interested in pacification as an element of the overall strategy.

I would be hard pressed to remember exactly the date of Hop Tac, but it was sometime in late 1964 or very early 1965. General Westmoreland, I think, had a meeting with Colonel Jasper Wilson, who was the III Corps senior advisor in Bien Hoa. When he came back from that meeting, he called me and said he thought it would be a good idea to have an integrated and major pacification operation around Saigon to show that through proper coordination, proper follow-through, the overall level of security could be improved. And he felt that since [there were] constant upheavals in the government and a good deal of confusion in what was going on, it would be palliative to improve security around the

capital of Saigon, and it would be more for show than dealing the enemy some massive blow. There were not tremendously large numbers of enemy units close to Saigon, and the level of guerilla activity wasn't particularly high except from the south in the Long An area because of the main growth areas to the southeast of Saigon. There was also substantial guerilla activity out to the west in the so-called pineapple fields over towards the Parrot's Beak.

Anyway, when General Westmoreland came back, he thought it was a good idea to engage the Vietnamese and the American advisors in, first of all, a major planning effort and then a major operational effort. We called the operation something else to begin with. I can't remember the name, but when we met with the Vietnamese, they thought that Hop Tac sounded like a good name ["hop tac" means "cooperation" in Vietnamese]. And I'd have to go back again in history--I can't remember why they picked that name, but, nevertheless, I was detailed on a part-time basis, still as special assistant, still working at J-3, but I was also supposed to go out and spend some time with III Corps in planning this particular operation. I don't think it had any really significant and new innovations in it except that I think that the adviser/advisee relationships were given additional stress, and sort of an operations center was set up with the Vietnamese running the show with the appropriate American advisers in the same room and surrounding offices. So it was an example of cooperation of advisory effort and effort on the part of the Vietnamese.

There was an attempt made to improve substantially on the Vietnamese side--I guess on the American side, too--the coordination among the various activities. In other words, it was presumably an RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces] with the army

and the air force brought together--and a little bit of navy--operation, but, the special branch were brought in the regular police, the regional forces were adequately represented and there was even some representation of the popular forces. We had an AID [Agency for International Development] representative, and a USIA [U.S. Information Agency] representative; there was a CIA person. So there was an effort made to collect intelligence from the civilian side as well as the military side and to get all the forces operating together. As I said earlier, I guess a master plan was put together, and the master plan dealt heavily with the coordination, and it dealt with the time-phasing of the operation instead of an ever-expanding oil spot, tremendous oil spot, around Saigon. And you went out step by step and in phases, giving specific attention to each of the hamlets and villages in each of the bands that you could imagine growing in an increasing circle around Saigon. It was almost exactly circular.

G: Rings of steel? Something like that?

M: Right. But I don't think that most of the people involved really had given a whole lot of thought to pacification, and it kind of looked to me like a Leavenworth exercise where handout number three, you drew one circle, and handout number four, you drew another one; it wasn't something tremendously brilliant or different.

G: What did the press think of this? I've seen a few press accounts that were rather skeptical and didn't seem to think anything was particularly new or particularly [inaudible].

M: Well, as I just said, it wasn't particularly new or particularly different, and if you'd looked at the rings that represented each of the phases, you would see that not a whole lot of time was given to quote "pacifying," close quote, the hamlets within the various bands. It moved out

rather rapidly and, presumably, it would be sort of rapid clearing operations, talks with the farmers in the hamlets, some civil works activities in repairing the school or fixing the bridge or giving the people some pumps. It was no long-term training of the popular forces. I guess they were still called at that time self-defense corps people, and it didn't replicate what we had tried earlier and found to be successful in Bac Lieu and in the IV Corps area. It was taking something that went very slowly and took a lot of time and a lot of effort and doing a lot of the same thing in a big hurry in an effort to, as I said, demonstrate good will for the people around Saigon, and generally increase the level of security so as to reduce the nervousness of an important group around the capital.

G: Was there an attempt to critique the exercise when it was deemed completed, or did it--?

M: I think it just kind of fizzled out, and there was not a real stop to it. It was a continuation of the province pacification plans after people got sort of tired of going every day to the big headquarters and coordinating operations between Long An and Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh and whatever. I don't recall--I just stopped going to the headquarters because Colonel Wilson and I didn't get along too well.

G: He was an old-timer in Vietnam, wasn't he?

M: Yes. This isn't Wilbur Wilson.

G: No, Jasper?

M: This is Jasper Wilson.

G: Jap. Jap Wilson, I believe they called him.

M: Yes. Wilbur Wilson was sort of the father of pacification and strategic hamlets and was quite a well-known character.

G: "Coal-bin Willy."

M: "Coal-bin Willy" Wilson. But Colonel [Jasper] Wilson was more interested in regular kind of military operations than pacification, and he didn't want to get messed up with that in my view.

G: Now you left how long after Hop Tac then? Not too long, I guess?

M: I guess I left in July. June or July, right.

G: Well, that was six months.

M: Yes.

G: What was the state of pacification when you left, or is it possible to generalize about that?

M: Well, some substantial attention had been taken away from pacification with the news that the North Vietnamese were introducing main force units and that there had been an increased level of large-scale attacks in the North and even in the Highland. And so the units which had been assigned to pacification during the period where they emphasized pacification--the so-called fifty-four ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] battalions, I think that was the right number--those units were gradually pulled away to deal with the main force operations. Of course, it was at this time that we introduced the U.S. forces, and so the people's attention just got taken away from Hop Tac or any of the other pacification activities.

Over all, I don't think there was a big deterioration in the number of hamlets that had reached a certain level of security. In fact, I suspect that if you were on the enemy side, the enemy was giving more attention to facilitating the movement of the main force units supporting their main force strategy and trying to deal with the introduction of U.S. forces.

I would guess, from the enemy's side, that the air attacks on the North were quite upsetting and therefore they wanted to concentrate the disruptive attacks in the South to the regions around the main air bases at Da Nang, and there was a lot of activity from the lower-level units up there and around Da Nang. And there was some activity--if you'd like to look at the sort of activity records--but I think there were some increased attacks around Bien Hoa. So that's what I would say the enemy was thinking about, so they didn't tell everybody to go out and disrupt pacification efforts.

G: Yes. Were you part of the discussion that apparently went on over whether security was the first priority for pacification? It was kind of a chicken-and-egg sort of question. Do you have to provide security first or do you pacify the village first?

M: Well, you provide the security first, and I didn't have any doubts about that, and in any discussion, I would certainly say that that was the most important thing. In fact, in most of my thinking about pacification, pacification was a vehicle for getting military forces diverted from somewhat useless search-and-destroy operations to get them assigned to active security roles that would protect the people and the lines of communication and the economic base. I didn't visualize sticking a whole bunch of troops around each hamlet and making each hamlet an outpost, but rather than send some troops on a long excursion to the Ira Dang Valley, why not focus them on the Viet Cong companies and battalions that were closer to populated areas with the purpose of, number one, keeping them away and, number two, eroding their fighting capability?

G: Was there any tension between yourself and people who were advocating that and people who were in favor of what you called long-range [inaudible]?

M: Yes. I was considered a nut because I--

G: I hadn't heard that. That's kind of an extreme statement for your stance, I think. Why did they consider you [a nut]? Who considered you a nut?

M: Well, I think maybe if you went and talked to Colonel Wilson he might say that. He and I got along very well. I got along with all these people; I didn't fight with them. But I just had a feeling that they had a different view of the Vietnam War than I did. I always thought that General DePuy was on my side until--

G: Until when?

M: --later when he became the First Division commander and became the leading advocate of thrashing around in the bushes.

G: All right. Well, he was supposedly devising the search-and-destroy strategy about this time.

M: That's right. That's what I said.

G: Is it correct to give him credit for that term and the idea?

M: I don't really know. I thought that he was more concerned with the security, as I said, the population, economic base lines, and communication when he was the J-3 than he was in pushing a major search-and-destroy type of strategy. And, as I said, I only jokingly said that it turned out different later when he became the First Division commander.

G: You know, his record there is pretty well known. All right. So you left Vietnam in the summer of 1965 just when the big American commitment was beginning.

M: That's right.

G: Where did you go?

M: I went to the Army War College.

G: You went to the war college. And you were there how long?

M: For a year.

G: The regular tour?

M: Right. I came down to Washington a few times before I graduated because it had already been decided that I would go to the White House and work with [Robert] Komer.

G: Who picked you up for that one?

M: Ambassador Komer.

G: He knew you from--?

M: No, he'd heard of me from other people.

G: I see. So you went to work for him from the war college?

M: Right.

G: What were you doing? What was his--?

M: Well, he was the special assistant to the President, and President Johnson had assigned him as the guy that was going to overlook the Vietnam War. You know, he was going to be separate from the National Security Council and was going to be President Johnson's personal guy in charge of the war in Vietnam. So Komer had set up a small office over in the Executive Office Building; it was right next to Vice-president [Hubert] Humphrey's office, as a matter of fact, in the northeast corner on the first floor. And he had assembled a small staff of himself, Ambassador [William] Leonhart, Dick Holbrooke, later assistant secretary of State for Southeast Asia, and Dick Moorstien of RAND, who has since died, and Charles Cooper [?] of RAND--both of them were economists--and John Sylvester [?]

from the State Department, and some fellow with a name much like yours, who was sort of there as an administrative person. And they needed a military person, so I was going to be the military assistant.

G: Was there any difficulty in keeping the lines of authority and communications from getting crossed? It seems to me that the State Department would have all sorts of people who were interested in the same things.

M: Well, the idea of the office was to coordinate the activities; that's an unusual job for the White House. I mean, the National Security Council really doesn't coordinate activities because they have a staff, but the responsibility rests with each of these members on the National Security Council. When the Secretary of State comes over, he represents the State Department, and it is very difficult for the staff to carry out integrated operations. But Komer is a great activist and a student of military history and a student of military organization, and, I guess, a student of government organization to a lesser degree. And he saw the great necessity to coordinate the activities of the various departments, not unlike what we were trying to do on a micro scale in Vietnam on pacification.

The idea was in pacification, as I told you before, was to make certain that the military forces and the people working on improving the economy, and people working on informing the people better, the so-called "Psy War," the intelligence activities, the police activities, were all brought together, and the people who were going to work on this hamlet and this village and this district and this province in a systematic way with adequate resources there, rather than just spreading everything out where no one would have sufficient resources or so-called critical mass. And there would be intelligence operations

here and the military forces here with information being learned about enemy activities a hundred miles away and not sufficient intelligence for these troops that were in a whole different section of the country and building schools in hamlets just because the schools needed to be built rather than coordinating the building of schools with where there was going to be lasting security and deciding that there were going to be five essential provinces. And you were going to get sufficient forces and money and cement and concrete--I've already said concrete--reinforcing bar and tin roofing, engineer support to those provinces and stick with it for two years, six years, twenty-two years, however long it was going to take and not change priorities until you had accomplished what you had set out to do. In other words, make the enemy shift his forces to combat yours rather than you shifting to do whatever the enemy wanted you to do.

Well, that whole idea was implanted from within the White House by Komer, and, as you said, you had difficulties in coordinating the individual departments because they all wanted to do it on their own. But I think if you'll look at the record, the record will show that Ambassador Komer--at that time, it wasn't Ambassador Komer, it was Special Assistant Komer--was a great activist, and he was very adroit in dealing with people, and he wasn't afraid to take on people, and he would simply say, "If you don't want to do it this way, we'll go up and see the President." People would say, "Come to think of it, maybe you have a good idea there."

G: I was going to ask if he ever hesitated to use that clout.

M: He never hesitated to do that, but people didn't take him up on these threats, and he maintained very close contact with the President, sending notes that we worked on as a

staff, and which he fixed, up to the President saying sort of what he was going to do and getting a note back, "Keep going, Bob. Good work! Way to go!"

G: You were the military operative in this matrix of staff.

M: Right.

G: This is kind of an unorthodox thing for a military man to be doing unless it's—the only parallel I can think of is in military government in an occupied country. What did Komer ask you to do specifically in this context? Advice or liaison or what?

M: Well, he asked me to be a principal staff person, to do a major portion of the planning work in the office. I mean, the other people weren't planners. Dick Moorstien and Chuck Cooper from RAND they were macro-economists. John Sylvester from the State Department was a State Department desk officer-type and hadn't done a whole lot of planning, and Ambassador Leonhart had not been a major planner. So I was the writer/planner, and we were pushing very hard on pacification and the development of the resources to carry out a much expanded pacification plan.

For example, we were heavily involved in trying to come up with a scheme for dealing with the Viet Cong infrastructure, and we started the whole Phoenix idea in that office and developed it and then packaged it up and later took it over to Vietnam. We, in that office, tried to spend a great deal of time--and this is where Moorstien and Cooper were very, very good--on stabilizing the economy in Vietnam. And I guess you'd say that Moorstien and Cooper came up with the whole idea of the commercial import program with substantial help from Chet Cooper [Chester L. Cooper] over in the State Department.

G: This was on anti-inflation [inaudible]?

M: That's right, and a simple explanation was that you wanted to send products over to Vietnam that were desired by the population, and so they would use their *piastres*, which were available in increasing numbers, to buy these products, generating *piastres*, which would then be used by the United States through the Vietnamese government, to pay for the increasing number of RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces] forces and the police and all the other government people that had to be paid. So you took the *piastres* out of the economy and then turned them back into pay and just kept turning them over, and you didn't create the shortages of rice and gasoline and other types of things that you would normally find in time of war. The thing that Komer was most concerned with was making certain that the price of rice didn't increase; so there was a big, big effort to send enough rice, maybe even an excess, over there to make the people there see that they didn't have to hoard, or they didn't have to get nervous because the economy was falling apart. It was very successful.

Through the years, the inflation was held down to very minimal levels. Of course, as you did these kinds of things new problems came up. As we started the commercial import program, we couldn't get enough shipping through the port of Saigon. You know, there was a big back up of ships out of Vung Tau because the people were concerned about security along the Vung Tau River coming to Saigon. So, things we'd do in our office we'd send rockets out to Vietnam telling people how important it was to continue pacification efforts in Long An and in Bien Hoa to make certain that the shipping canal, the shipping route stayed open.

G: Did your office play a role in getting that port problem ironed out?

M: Well, I think, if you spoke to Ambassador Komer, you would find out that he would say that he alone was the spearhead behind that, and one of the things that Komer pushed for, and I'm sure he had the direct support of the President, was to have the military take over the port operations although the State Department and AID were opposed to it.

G: You mentioned Phoenix, and that set a train of thought going. Do you know what the ICEX [Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation] program consisted of? Were you involved in that program at all?

M: Yes.

G: What was the concept behind ICEX? What was the basic formula for that program to work? Now, the military had an intelligence collection program and I gather that the Phoenix program was to take that and add something to it. Is that correct, or not?

M: Well, I could get a little bit mixed up on this one, but let me just overall describe that Ambassador Komer, or Bob Komer at that time, and our little office in the White House worked very closely with the CIA, and our principal contact out there was Bill Colby. In fact, we spent the bulk of our time with the Pentagon, obviously, the State Department, and separately from the State Department, AID. We didn't spend a whole lot of time with--[interruption]--I've got to go give a short speech, but I'll come back.

G: Great. Okay. Do you want to pause now?

M: Yes.

G: Okay.

M: I need to go.

[Interruption]

G: All right, sir. I had asked you about the Warrenton [?] Conference.

M: I wasn't at the Warrenton Conference, but it was an important conference in that it at least caused the people back here in Washington to give more thought about pacification. You know, the conference took place, I think, right before I came to the White House.

G: It says December, l965-January, l966?

M: That's right, right before I came to the White House. The conference report was available to us in Mr. Komer's office, and we took, I guess you'd say, note of it. I, for one, felt that we knew a little bit more about pacification as a result of my being involved in it from the ground up for a couple of years than the people at Warrenton did.

So we didn't make a huge effort to change our thinking because of the Warrenton Conference although they were essentially on target.

G: There was another conference in February in Honolulu. Do you know anything about that one? It seems to me there was a particular focus on pacification then at LBJ's direction. Is that correct?

M: That's right. And it was Komer's work that caused that conference to take place.

G: I see. Did you go to that one?

M: I did not go to that one, no.

G: Were you involved in any planning for it or anything?

M: No, that was right before I got to the White House.

G: Oh, okay. All right. What do you know about something called the PROVN [The Program for the Pacification and Long Term Development of South Vietnam] Study? P-R-O-V-N.

M: Well, the PROVN Study was put together over in the Pentagon at the direction of General Harold K. Johnson. General Johnson was the chief of staff of the army, and whenever he came to Vietnam--I can recall him coming when I was there in the 1963-65 period--he took a special interest in the advisors that were involved with the pacification effort, working with the Vietnamese. He just had an intense interest sort of in the people of Vietnam and how you could best help them so they would help themselves because he, I think, was particularly concerned about any expansion of the war and the introduction of U.S. forces. He was a very thoughtful man in that, as he said it, he was able when he was a prisoner of the Japanese in World War II--he was on the Bataan Death March--that he had a great deal of time to reflect, and, as he has said to put his thinking in order. As I said, he was very impressive in his sort of broad thought as opposed to something that somebody might say narrow-military thinking with a mind focused on war. He was focused on much more prevention of war, keeping wars limited, avoiding any possible nuclear exchange, and that sort of thing. So he caused some of the people in the Pentagon to work on this comprehensive study on pacification in Vietnam.

One of the key architects of that study was General, then Colonel, Volney Warner, who later took my place in the White House when I ended up in Vietnam as a forward extension of the White House.

That study, I might say, was again nothing extraordinary but it was important and it focused at least the attention of the army staff on pacification because it was endorsed by the chief of staff and so everybody knew about it; and it, as I said, broadened the thoughts of the leaders and the staff people in the Pentagon.

G: Now in, I guess it was late 1966, there was an effort made to try to coordinate pacification better in Vietnam, and they brought it together under something called OCO [Office of Civil Operations], is that correct?

M: Right.

G: What was OCO supposed to do that hadn't been done before?

M: Well, it was called the Office of Civil Operations, and it was the result of the constant pressure by Mr. Komer on the leaders in Vietnam to do a better job on pacification. Obviously, I was sitting back here writing a lot of these things, and I was in Vietnam and sort of telling them what to write or sending it back to be written or transmitted from here after, obviously, going through Komer. I'm not saying that I sent myself any orders, but I would indicate what orders we thought we'd like to get.

I described earlier on, in our first interview, the coordination or integration of efforts at the hamlet and village and district level, and that was the big thrust of the pacification concept that I was espousing and which I had tested, and others tested too. Well that coordination and integration was not easy to bring about, but it was possible to bring it about at the local level with great effort. But the higher up you went, the more fragmented the operation became because everybody had their own program, had their own budget, their own objectives, and you'd kind of put it in a different order. They had their own objectives and their own programs to meet those objectives and the budget to carry out the program. You could say, because of lack of integrated, fully-coordinated direction from Washington, that those programs--

Tape l of 2, Side 2

G: All right, sir.

M: I was using the AID program or the USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] program in Vietnam as an example. They might have a schools program, and they were going to concentrate on building schools in I Corps at the same time that the AB plan from the RVNAF--I guess the AB was an ARVN plan, not an RVNAF plan--was concentrating on the IV Corps. It didn't make a whole lot of sense. Again the CIA had its own program and maybe the intelligence collection efforts weren't integrated with the military operation, and perhaps they were spending more time worrying about COSVN [Central Office for South Vietnam] than the Viet Cong infrastructure which was of immediate importance to the security in a particular village, district, or province.

Anyway, the idea then, transmitted by Mr. Komer over to Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge and Deputy Ambassador [William] Porter was that you ought to take what had worked at the local level and was beginning to work a little bit at the province level and apply that at the national level, and you ought to bring all of the field operations of all the non- military agencies together in a single, integrated headquarters.

And so again with, I would say, a great deal of pressure, the Ambassador gave Deputy Ambassador Porter the job of doing that. And so I sat over there with--by that time I was spending most of my time in Vietnam. I pulled together in Ambassador Porter's office a number of people. We had someone from USAID and USIA [U.S. Information Agency] and CIA and *et cetera*, *et cetera*, and we planned an integrated headquarters called the Office of Civil Operations headed up by the Deputy Ambassador with a director. The

first director was Wade Latham of USAID in [inaudible], and I was the director of operations. I always had a lot of different hats.

G: So, at what point do you stop being on the White House staff and become on the OCO staff, or is that--?

M: On both.

G: I see. Is it an over-simplification--well, I know it's an over-simplification. Does it do to violence to history to say that you were analyzing the needs of the local situation in Vietnam, reporting on that to Ambassador Komer who was not yet ambassador--

M: Right.

G: --who would then send a directive back to Saigon saying, "This is how you fix it."

M: That's right!

G: Okay. Did this create any problems? Did you step on any bureaucratic toes this way, or break any [inaudible]?

M: Sure, people were pretty nervous about this.

G: It's like having a spy from headquarters in your midst.

M: That's right. Mr. Komer had a very good relationship with Deputy Ambassador Bill Porter, and maybe some times, Mr. Porter would get exasperated at Mr. Komer's insistence.

G: Did you ever feel the wrath of Ambassador Porter?

M: As I said, no, he and I got along very well. I kept him informed of what was going on; he knew what was happening.

G: What was wrong with OCO? It obviously had just phased out rather quickly.

M: Well, OCO was an interim step in a broader strategy.

G: Whose strategy?

M: Why, it was Mr. Komer's strategy.

G: Okay.

M: But the strategy was that there was no way that pacification would work in Vietnam unless it had the full support of the military forces, both the Vietnamese and the American. So the obvious thing to do was to give pacification responsibility to COMUSMACV, and then put all the civilian agencies under him. The civilian agencies didn't want that, so you had to give them a chance to try it on their own. And it certainly came to pass rather rapidly that just by integrating all the civil operations you couldn't greatly improve the quality and scope of pacification because you didn't have the real "big boy" with you.

G: And since everything depended upon security and therefore on the military, the essential element of coordination was missing.

M: Was missing. We could draw up a big plan in OCO even though we coordinated the Vietnamese and the ARVN, and the next thing you know they had changed that plan because MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] staff had gotten together with the people over at Joint General Staff, JGS Headquarters. And all of a sudden, they would pull out all of the pacification battalions and were going to send them off on some big operation.

G: And so there was no use trying to build your school while all the soldiers were out.

M: That's right. That's right. And there is always the conflict on how much you were going to put into the main force versus how much you were going to put into regional [forces], and, by this time, we'd changed the name to the Popular Forces.

G: How did COMUSMACV feel about taking pacification on under his wing, so to speak?

M: Well, he was probably nervous about it. General Westmoreland had shown a substantial interest in pacification from the very beginning, and he had brought me up to be his special assistant. As I said, I knew him very well, and he had confidence in me, and I spent a lot of time going out and seeing pacification operations. We raised pacification in the staff meetings and created interest in it. I suspect he wouldn't have taken the job voluntarily. I don't know the extent to which President Johnson influenced him, but I know that--I guess the meeting was at Honolulu, Honolulu or Guam. Which one was it?

G: Guam was in the spring of 1967. April, I think. That was right before Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker came out, and I think Ambassador Komer came at that time.

M: Yes, so it was at the Guam meeting that I'm sure that President Johnson convinced General Westmoreland that it was a good idea to take over pacification, and he said he would help by sending Mr. Komer out there to be ambassador and to be, for the first time, as I guess, in the history of the United States' armed conflict, a civilian commander, a civilian in command of military forces.

G: Right. A few people have said that Ambassador Komer was LBJ's man in MACV. Do we give any credence to that? Was he a spy at headquarters?

M: Well, I think Ambassador Komer worked very hard at not being the spy in the headquarters, and he was given a seat on the Mission Council, and I guess at that time--who was the ambassador when we first got there?

G: Well, it would have been Lodge, I guess.

M: [Inaudible]. Anyway, Ambassador Komer would bring up his ideas first at the staff meetings in MACV, which he religiously attended, and then at the Mission Council. By that time, the office back here wasn't as strong as it was when Ambassador Komer was here because they left Ambassador Leonhart behind, and he was a different kind of person. He was much more used to doing things in the Washington-coordinated fashion, trying not to run things from the White House. He was just not a guy that took charge and ran things. He was very intelligent and very thoughtful but always a team player who didn't want to be out in front, at least, that's my impression of him. So it wasn't that strong an office to go to though on the military side. I had my friend General Warner--then Colonel Warner, Volney Warner--that I could talk to, and we had most of the time, though he came out quite a bit to Vietnam, Dick Holbrooke, who was a very strong guy and a very capable person. And so I would talk to Warner and Holbrooke and another guy, named Peter Rosenblatt almost--well, in fact, I talked to them every night.

G: To your knowledge, did Ambassador Komer talk to the President during this period?

M: On the telephone? No, he would not do things like that though obviously I can't tell you he never talked [to him], but that was not the mode of operation.

G: Some people were afraid that he was not adverse to doing an end-run from time to time if he thought it would advance the cause and so on, but it's hard to find evidence of that.

M: Yes. To the best of my knowledge, he never talked to the President on the telephone. Obviously, as I said, he would talk to Ambassador Leonhart but not a whole lot, but I would talk, as I said, essentially every night to the office.

G: How was this unique arrangement perceived by the more orthodox--?

M: Well, they hated it.

G: They did?

M: They hated it.

G: On both sides? Civilians and military?

M: I think you got less opposition from the civilians, particularly when they saw that their goal was being increased rather than decreased. They were concerned that everything would just be turned over to MACV, and they would lose all influence, but the CORDS, the Office of Civil Operation and Revolutionary Development Support, was the staff element. It was not the office; it was the staff element, and it was equal to the J-3 or the J-2 or the J-1, and you simply had another major staff division called CORDS, and the civilians were given very substantial roles and positions in CORDS. Even though we had a military general as a deputy chief of staff for CORDS, he had a civilian deputy. Much of the planning was done, interestingly by a civilian named Clay McManaway, who, today, is United States Ambassador to Haiti, and you know, he had some civilian people that had been working in OCO--Clay McManaway was my deputy in OCO, and we added some civilians over there who were pretty good at planning and coordinating things, and they came over to the CORDS to set up the little planning office. Each of the civilian-like divisions of CORDS, like refugees, had a civilian. You know, Ogden Williams is the--well, he was the Chieu Hoi guy. He was the director of Chieu Hoi, and then a civilian was the director of Refugee Affairs. So there was this integration of military people and civilians in the headquarters, and I think the civilians saw that they were getting greater influence rather than less.

The military people were concerned that the direction of the war was switched over too much to pacification because Ambassador Komer was very persuasive in switching a lot of the sources to pacification. The thing that never happened was, in my view--other people will say differently I am sure--is that there was never an integrated strategy. We sort of had a pacification strategy, and an anti-main-force strategy, and the two weren't sufficiently integrated. They weren't totally separated.

G: Did that ever improve, the less-than-perfect coordination between military strategy and pacification strategy?

M: Oh, yes. It certainly improved by just being there--

G: Yes.

M: --because pacification was in every staff meeting. Part of almost every briefing was, in effect, on pacification. It was, I would say, a brilliant move to make pacification a really viable program. It was non-viable until that happened, and once that happened over time it became a very viable and strong program. The same thing was happening, of course, on the Vietnamese side with President [Nguyen Van] Theiu taking an increasing interest in pacification and placing very, very much increased pressure on the military forces to pay attention to pacification. And then, at our advice--and when you say "our," that's Ambassador Komer's and all of us advice--the Vietnamese set up under the Prime Minister something very, very similar to what we had in MACV headquarters. We brought in all the ministries and ARVN and the police and everything into one office, and, interestingly, that office was headed up by General Hunt, who I said to everyone was a good guy. He was the person that I had initially worked with when I was with the Twenty-first Division in Bac

Lieu. He was the division commander, and he was the one that I had worked out this pacification test, and so he understood perfectly what we wanted to accomplish.

[Interruption]

M: Anyway the Vietnamese formed under the Prime Minister an office that was very similar to the operation that we had over in MACV, and we had people from CORDS down at that office as their regular place of duty.

G: Let me get your comments on a couple of specific programs that were operating at this time. All of them have been criticized; all of them have been praised. It's hard to know what to make of it. The Chieu Hoi program, for example, has been criticized as--I don't know how to characterize it. We gave away a lot of money to get a whole lot of not very high-powered VC to come over. What was your feeling about that?

M: Well, my feeling was that the Chieu Hoi program was one of the most successful specific, small programs in the whole Vietnam War. It was not an idea that--it's an American idea that had been kind of a standard thing in war, particularly guerilla wars, and it was carried out, I think, extremely well over there with very limited resources. I mean the Chieu Hoi camps weren't Hilton hotels. There were never enough staff people, and you never got enough support from the Vietnamese government. There was a computer tracking of these people that "Chieu-Hoied"--to create a verb. So some people obviously came through the system a number of times. But it was the cheapest possible way to neutralize an enemy soldier or enemy supporter. No other program can possibly on an economic basis match it. I think it was excellent and that it was generally well run, and that the fellow I mentioned earlier, Ogden Williams, was exceptionally good [inaudible].

G: Where is he now?

M: He lives out in West Virginia on a farm at the top of a hill, but he called my wife just last week, that's why I'm reminded of him, and he says he is getting lonely out in West Virginia. He has moved back to Washington and has an apartment here.

G: I'm going to look him up.

M: Right.

G: How about the RD [Revolutionary Development] cadre program?

M: I think that's probably an over rated program. It was necessary to train the people that were involved in pacification whether they were the popular forces or the hamlet chief or the village chief or the local police people; and so this was sort of a way around training them. You were going to go out and train some motivated people called the RD cadre, and they were going to go into the hamlets, much like Viet Cong cadre, and rally the people maybe even against their own leaders. So you're kind of using the communist technique on your side, and except in exceptional cases where the RD cadre were particularly good individuals, I'm not sure it was that successful.

G: Do you think that as I think Peer de Silva has written, it started out as a very good small program, and then because it was so expanded that it was diluted, the quality went down. Was that your observation?

M: Well, that [was] certainly part of the problem. I guess a bigger part of the problem was that the Vietnamese leadership was always leery of some third force. And I think Colonel Bay, who was the head of the RD cadre had sort of in his mind that he was the third force and was going to be the savior of the country. I mean, he was a real expansive thinker.

G: A charismatic kind of a guy, I guess.

M: Well, I think—yes, if you'd say so.

G: Did you know John Stervaggio?

M: Yes. Sure.

G: He was the link, I guess, between your office--

M: That's right. That's right. And I got Stervaggio to join our headquarters.

G: Well, he'd been around for a while, hasn't he?

M: That's right. More important, I guess, was the work of Frank Scotton.

G: Yes. Tell me about that.

M: Well, I think Frank Scotton was a very close friend of Colonel Bay--Major Bay, I guess, at that time--and had been involved in training some of the first cadre. I guess he probably operated under a USIA program, probably funded by the CIA. I don't really know. And he was a very committed individual that took a great love of the Vietnamese people and was really concerned about quote "saving them," unquote, and so I suspect that he probably influenced Major Bay as much as any American, and probably had a significant role in how the RD cadre training was set up and what have you, whereas Stervaggio was a very intense person who became a very good friend of Bay but was much more of a personal support. Somebody to talk to and somebody that could say, "You're doing a good thing," as opposed to masterminding what the training should consist of and how you would use RD cadre.

G: What was the role of land reform in pacification? I think it had kind of a checkered history, at least my reading of it is.

M: I can really say that to my knowledge no real evaluation has ever been made of land reform. We didn't perhaps have time or the intelligence to have sort of an opinion survey done where you went out and systematically interviewed people who had benefited from land reform and then, perhaps, interviewed at the same time people that lost as a result of land reform, but I think it was a necessary ingredient of the over all pacification program and convinced everyone that pacification was going to benefit the common man or the peasant in Vietnam. If it was just going to give him security and new seeds and better schools and what have you, that's sort of a transitory benefit, but if it were to really set up the individual on a sounder, long-term, economic footing, then you could say that it was not only working but would last. And so I'd say that you had to have land reform as one element.

G: What was the Ap Doi-Moi [?] program? Do you recall that?

M: The Ap Doi-Moi was, as I recall, sort of a super-hamlet--I could be wrong--where you were going to select out the important hamlets and give them an extra dose of everything, including RD cadre, but it was never an important element of the overall program. It was sort of I think a word that the Vietnamese cooked up somewhere. I can't even tell you where it came from [*ap doi moi* approximately means "hamlet renovation"].

G: Were you familiar with the security in pacification efforts that the Marines were making up North?

M: Yes, certainly.

G: Was there anything unique about that? I know that they had the County Fair, for example, and they had--what did they call it where they would send a squad of Marines off to marry up with a local force platoon?

M: I had it in the top of my head just a minute ago. The County Fair was a technique, and it wasn't really a whole program, but the Marines, starting in 1965, came up with the idea. It was probably General [Victor] Krulak's idea, and it was carried out by John Corson. And it was simply to marry up a Marine squad with the self-defense corps squad or platoon in the hamlet with the two living together and working together for the purpose of improving security. And then the Marines followed up that improved security with their civic action program.

In other words, they spent a lot of time and effort on sending a Marine bulldozer out there to level the site for the school or sending a Marine engineer platoon out to put up the bridge, and that sort of thing. And, yes, I think it worked quite well. The only problem with it is that it was kind of an Americanization of pacification and tended to set up the hamlets as targets for the Viet Cong when the Marines ultimately left. They would come back and punish the hamlet for having put up with the American infidels, I guess that's the right word.

G: Corson got sour on things later, didn't he? He has written a couple of things which indicate he's not all happy with these experiences in Vietnam. Do you know anything about that?

M: Yes. I've talked to John and--not for a couple of years, but he just maybe didn't feel that enough credit came his way, or there was not enough follow-through on the idea that he worked so hard on. I think when General [Lewis] Walt was over there, John Corson was riding high because General Walt was the big promoter of pacification amongst all of the top generals over there, and he felt very good about what the Marines were doing, and urged other people to do the same thing. But it was at the wrong place at the wrong time as

it turned out. I think that the idea was a very good one, and that it was the best way of providing security for the Da Nang airstrip because the hills were all around it, and it was very tough terrain, and this was certainly a better way of providing security for that airstrip than a whole bunch of search-and-destroy operations in my view.

G: Tell me about the hamlet evaluation system. That gets a lot of talk, too.

M: That's a very good system--(laughter)--a terrific system. Obviously we developed that in CORDS, and it was my idea to have some more sophisticated evaluation system than I had been able to introduce before. Now, it wasn't a new idea. When I came over there, and the Strategic Hamlet program was going on there was an evaluation run by the Vietnamese for each of the hamlets, but it was not felt that the evaluation was terribly well done or honest. In other words, province chiefs might, just to get a good pat on the back, say that their hamlets were better than they were. So I had seen the systems and the follow-on systems operate, and I said what we needed to do was to have a system, have it run by the Vietnamese, but we needed to have our own full check on the hamlets with our district advisers. By that time, we'd followed through completely on the district advisory program, which I think was a super program--(laughter)--particularly because I was the big architect of it; I think it was a terrific program. But we had five advisers out in each of the 245 districts, so we could get every hamlet checked by an adviser every month--that was a requirement--and to visit every hamlet at least once a month and to send us their own evaluation of the hamlet if it differed from the Vietnamese evaluation. And it also provided a more perfect channel for getting the evaluations in. In other words, if they were slow coming up the Vietnamese channel, then we could get a straight shot from our district

adviser right up to MACV headquarters. And what it did was give you a month-by-month status of all the important things in each hamlet, and it was not so much that the instantaneous "Here it is today at the end of November," or let's say "end of October," it's that that wasn't nearly as significant as, "Here is how it looked at the end of October last year. Here is how it changed. And here it is today, a year later." Where has the DVN [?] made progress. Where is there a stand-off? And where have the Viet Cong made progress? And we had it set up so that you could see those changes, and everybody said, well, we spent a lot of money on the computer system, and all of that, but it was important to be able to print it out in three colors with standard symbols that ultimately the press could understand, the DVN people could understand, the advisers could understand, [and] the leaders could understand. It got to the point where people couldn't wait to get the HES report, and I would always write a cable--I wrote it for years and years--at the end of each period; Komer would send a report back to all the agencies back here and to the White House. We always labeled it confidential, but then Komer would always say but, "You know we've got to let the press know," and I'd say, "Pass it out to the press immediately."

G: Which is, I guess, technically a leak.

M: Yes.

H: Were you in Vietnam when the Tet Offensive broke?

G: Sure.

M: What was the impact of Tet on pacification?

G: Well, as Mr. Komer would say and all of us say, it was a big victory on the ground in Vietnam and a huge defeat back in this country, and it was the watershed where the popular

support, the public support of the war started to go downhill. How could everything go so bad so quickly when all the reports were so good? The reports must be fake; people must be stupid; it's inconceivable that the thing could happen, and I guess it happened because the Vietnamese, and probably the Americans too, were off their guard, and things were very, very good. And, as tradition would have it, since things were very good, huge numbers of ARVN forces were released to go home on leave at Tet, and those that weren't officially released left anyway, and it was part of the problem that we never solved over there, not having the ARVN battalions and regiments and divisions be largely composed of natives of the region in which they operated. Rather the ARVN division were strategic pawns that you moved around the map, so people always got jerked around and the recruiting and training system didn't feed people into the Twenty-first Division because they came from that Twenty-first Division area, and that was not coordinated adequately. And so when these people took leave, they didn't just go to the next town. They got on a bus or truck and went far away with the result that when the attack came, people weren't alert, number one; number two, they weren't there.

G: Where were you when Tet broke physically, do you remember?

M: I was in the house one and a half blocks from the embassy, and there was all the commotion out in the street because the Viet Cong had come down our street to attack the embassy, and you could hear the--you know, they were using rockets against the embassy, trying to break the wall down, and we had a radio in constant contact with the embassy.

G: You did?

M: Yes.

G: At your place?

M: Right in our house. Right. And I can remember General [George] Forsythe put on his flak jacket and steel helmet because his room was out by the street. My room was in the middle of the house, Komer's was at the back. But we were visited by the marine guards. The marine guards lived right down the street from us, and they came by, and they said they had gotten the word what was going on, and did we have any weapons that they could use because all they had was the marine--the little--

G: Subbaretto?

M: Yes, the little sawed-off submachine gun. And we had a couple, three or four, M-l6s, and so we traded and gave them the M-l6's so that they could go out and attack, and we took over the berrettas to protect Mr. Komer, but, as you know, the situation at the embassy wasn't very serious despite some reports that--

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

M: --after Tet was re-established within just a few days, pacification proceeded a pace following Tet.

G: Was it very common for the VC to target pacification during the Tet offensive? The general impression is, they had a tendency to just go by the villages?

M: Well, they really targeted government centers for the purpose of gaining I guess, [the] greatest [inaudible] psychological impact. I doubt if they thought they were going to take over the country by this offensive, and so maybe through clever planning, they decided that they could make the biggest impact simply by hitting the maximum number of provincial capitals and district towns, and they didn't kill a lot of cadre people out in the hamlets.

They didn't destroy a lot of schools, blow up a lot of bridges. They just didn't, as you say, appear to have targeted pacification at all.

G: To what do you ascribe the statements, then, that were being made that "pacification has suffered a serious setback?"

M: Got to write something, I guess.

(Laughter)

G: Well, I think Bob Komer was quoted as saying, "We've had a serious setback." Do you think he was just making what seems to be an obvious assumption at the time?

M: Well, he may have said that in the days following because it took you a couple of weeks to determine that you really have had a serious setback. I mean, we didn't know. We just said they didn't destroy hamlets or take off village chiefs and hamlet chiefs. We didn't have that information, but as I recall, when you had the first hamlet evaluation report after Tet it showed a regression, and I don't recall exactly, but some historian could go through the records. And I suspect that at the end of the second or third month it was right back to where it was pre-Tet. As I recall, that's about the way it was.

G: What was the effect on morale and so forth? Were you getting a sense of the shock effect that that had back here in Saigon?

M: Well, we didn't have enough time to spend a whole lot of time reading the newspapers. You read the local newspaper over there and that was it. But I guess you really didn't have that sense, and you had so much to do, and you had an extra amount to do after this to, quote, "repair the damage."

G: Right.

M: And, as I said, there wasn't a big drop in morale of the CORDS people that we were closest to. It certainly didn't affect the U.S. forces over there because they didn't sustain high casualties during Tet. In fact they were able to report rather significant successes against the enemy. The enemy finally came out and fought, and they thought that was terrific.

G: How close were you to the intelligence? What I am trying to get at is this--

M: Was there warning?

G: No, actually not. I'm thinking post-Tet. I'm thinking of the impact on the enemy and our assessment of the casualties. There were some extremely large numbers announced as to the enemy casualties, and I'm wondering if a) this was more or less accurate; and b) how was it reflected in the enemy's situation, post-Tet?

M: Well, I guess I really can't comment on that not being on the inside of intelligence. I suspect that the casualty figures were over-estimated by the same percentage or factor that they were always over-estimated.

G: Okay. Of course, that is a relevant question: Why didn't we have more warning? A lot of people have suggested that the population can't be very friendly if they let all these guys slip through the net to get to their staging areas to launch their attacks. What was your feeling about that?

M: Interestingly, we had a number of intelligence reports of increased movements. In fact, my companion in the office--we only had one other army guy in the office. We had a navy fellow Paul Seclusio, who's still in town, Lt. Col. Seclusio. He had a girlfriend whose family owned a laundry out by Bien Hoa, and so we got direct reports from his girlfriend's family. All sorts of Viet Cong running around just east of Saigon, and we duly reported

that to--actually, directly as I recall to--I think it was still Danny Graham was probably the head operator on the intelligence--

G: He was running the estimates--

M: I know we talked to Danny Graham about that, and I guess the intelligence system just wasn't quick enough to be able to add up a whole bunch of spot reports, being that most of those came in through the Vietnamese system, don't forget. We had a way of getting in intelligence from our district advisers. It was not one of their principal jobs. They gave it to the Vietnamese; [it] came up through Vietnamese channels, but we could also get it and then turn it over. We had this group of provincial reporters--we called them something else--sort of a team of guys like [Jean Andre] Sauvageot and Scott plus some military people that kept their fingers on the pulse of what was happening, and we got--

G: Was that the Census Grievance outfit?

M: No.

G: No, it was something else. Okay?

M: We just had a little team in CORDS that were our provincial evaluators could go around and make in-depth studies of how the RD cadre were doing or look into reports that the whole provincial operation in such-and-such a province was shot full of corruption. That's sort of an--

G: Yes. That's an interesting topic, too. Maybe you'd care to give a few words on the topic of corruption.

M: Well, yes I could always--

G: It occupies so much newsprint.

M: [Inaudible] a lot of words. But anyway, I guess you'd say that the movements were fairly well covered in that there wasn't an enemy of bloody people. They didn't slash through hamlets and terrorize the people, and move around. There were, as I said, reports, but they came up--since they were mainly reports from Vietnamese sources, and then they'd come in more slowly, and they'd be processed slowly and then they'd get over to MACV. MACV intelligence on bombing targets and main force; they're not keeping close track of movement of guerilla companies or VC battalions, and so, after the fact, when you put all the pieces together, you say, "Gee, I should have known it!" But it was simply a lag in reporting, a natural lag. You know, it didn't have an electronic network where things were being pumped in and sent to a central computer.

G: What about the notion that the way the VC went about it at Tet was so unprecedented and, in the view of many people, not very smart?

M: Well, the thing that was unprecedented was the number of simultaneous or well-coordinated attacks. Not well-coordinated in the sense that around this city these three battalions moved in fantastic coordination to launch the attack, but the fact that the attack at Bien Tre was within an hour of the attack at Sap Trang, and so forth and so on, where they all came at once.

G: Were you as surprised as most that the VC chose to come into the cities and expose themselves to our firepower the way they did?

M: I'm not sure that by coming into the cities you really expose yourselves to the firepower so much. That's one place to hide a little bit, if you come into the cities, and certainly you didn't run around and level Saigon trying to chase the guerillas or launch a lot of bombing

attacks. There were some that were launched on [inaudible] locations where the VC had dug in or something like that. At Hue, a whole bunch of them dug in, and there was a lot of bombing and artillery fire up there. By and large, I think they lost a lot of manpower as they pulled out and people chased them, including the ARVN that got back in time, the regional forces and the popular forces. [That's] my view.

G: Did pacification then accelerate after Tet when we discovered that the enemy had shot himself in the foot, so to speak?

M: Yes, we made a conscious effort to launch the ACP or Accelerated Pacification Program. APC, it was called, not ACP. APC like a--

G: ACP stands for an awful whole lot of things in the army, including--

M: We made specific efforts to create that plan and get the MACV staff to agree to it and get the President the prime minister's office, and the joint general staff all to agree with it. Everybody said, "Okay, another Komer thing." We started the thing with Project Takeover. In other words, we just happened to choose that name to let everybody know we were taking over, and this we handled as an accelerated pacification campaign. We just put more effort into it and more resources. I wrote it up.

G: Okay. Well, you were referred to me as the guy who wrote all that stuff Komer said.

M: That' s right.

G: Do you remember the circumstances when you learned of the President's March 31 speech when he announced he was not running, that he was curtailing the bombing and so on?

M: We didn't see that as--those of us who worked for the president were obviously distressed by that, but we didn't see it as affecting what we were doing. We didn't stop and take stock

and say, "Oh, for Christ's sake, we've got to go in a different direction." We got to work at 5:30 as usual and didn't spend a whole lot of time discussing that, went on with the accelerated pacification campaign.

G: When did you find out that Ambassador Komer was going to leave Vietnam?

M: I don't know. The day he learned about it.

G: Were you surprised that he was going to take that job?

G: Yes. But he always was a great student of the Middle East, and I thought he was one of the world's greatest experts on the politics of that region, and so I think he saw the appointment as the President's indication of faith in him and a congratulations on a very fine job, "and I want to give you your own ambassadorship in an area where you're a great expert." He thought it was terrific, and all of us thought it was terrific, too.

G: How would you contrast his style with the style of his successor?

M: (Laughter) Totally different. Totally different.

G: How about in effectiveness? How would you contrast the way they went about doing their job?

M: Well, [William] Colby was very effective in his own quiet way, and I think he was able to follow on with the organization that Komer had set up and therefore, I think he did an excellent job of--you know, didn't change CORDS. He just approached things, particularly MACV, differently. He tried to get along with people, and to--

[Interruption]

G: All right, sir.

M: Don't forget that Ambassador Komer recommended to both--I guess General Westmoreland was still there. General [Creighton] Abrams hadn't come.

G: Well, he was there.

M: That's right. Abrams was there. He recommended to General Abrams and to the Ambassador and to the President that Bill Colby be his successor. That was Komer's doing, I'm sure, a hundred per cent. I don't know; perhaps other people made that recommendation, but Komer made that sort of a *quid pro quo* of taking the other job. And then Komer asked me, he said, "I really want you to stay over and help Bill Colby out." And Colby came to me and asked me to stay over because he really needed me. And I said I would only stay over if he moved into my house, that I was not going to move into his house. He moved into my house.

G: Okay.

M: That shows you who's in control.

G: Everybody got what they wanted.

M: Right

G: How long were you there then? I can't remember when you came out.

M: I left in July.

G: 1968?

M: Right

G: Okay.

M: 1969.

G: I was going to say, because Komer was there into the fall, I guess, of 1968.

What were your final thoughts when you left? How did you sum things up? What did you see? Did you see a light at the end of the tunnel finally?

M: Yes. I wouldn't have left if I saw great problems that remained unsolved, but there were less exciting things to do because we weren't creating new things. We were making the various things that we had created run more smoothly, better relationship with the president's office, better operation down at the prime minister's office, and improved capabilities of the ARVN, a build-up of the regional forces and the popular forces. You know, it was going very well, and we had a territorial forces evaluation system, which was the follow-on--not follow-on, but it was a supplement to the hamlet evaluation system, that was going great. We had a good team of advisers, still getting the cream of the crop. And everything was going fine, and, as I said, I guess I couldn't stay over there forever.

G: Right. Sooner or later you had to come back home.

M: Right.

G: So what did you come back to? What was your next assignment?

M: I came back to the Chief of Staff's office in the Pentagon--

G: Which was at the time?

M: --to work for General DePuy.

G: Oh, okay.

M: You see, General DePuy and I have been good friends for a long time. I think he was one of the brightest people in the army in terms of thinking about future organization and doctrine. He's not a strategist, he's a, "Here's how you use new technology and integrate it with future military operations."

G: What kind of problems were you working on?

M: I was working on, at that time, not a tremendously exciting thing. General DePuy was trying to take over and make sense out of the whole army study system. He was spending lots and lots of money on all sorts of studies, and those studies weren't being fitted in properly to the long-range thinking of the army. As they said, he was an organization and doctrine guy. He later took over TRADOC, the Training and Doctrine Command, which he created, and that is one of the things that DePuy did, changed around in the army and put all training and doctrine together. It was all fragmented before, and so he wanted me to get the work going in Leavenworth and the War College and in all our contractor agencies and what have you while the army staff studies were brought together so, first of all, you knew what studies were going on, and you knew what their objectives were, and, [second], so we could start influencing those so that they all fitted together coherently. That's what I did--

G: Okay.

M: Until they could find a command for me because they decided that I'd never get promoted until I got to [inaudible]--

G: I was going to ask, you haven't had any time with troops have you?

M: No. I never have in my life.

G: So what did you get?

M: I went to be the division artillery commander at Fort Carson.

G: I see. Was the Fifth MAC there then?

M: Yes.

G: And then the Fifth MAC went up and went across, right? They went over, didn't they?

M: Later, yes, when I left. Yes. So, I had to go do that.

G: Okay. So you got your time in there.

M: Right.

G: And then when did you get your star?

M: I don't know. I came back before I got promoted. In fact, I only stayed out at Fort Carson a short time. President Nixon came along and put a lot of pressure on the Pentagon to get with the all-volunteer force and eliminate the draft, which was a fall out of the Vietnam War and a really unfair use of the draft in that war.

G: So you worked on the all-volunteer system?

M: Sure. General Westmoreland had called me and General [George I.] Forsythe together to set up a special office, called the Special Assistant for the Modern Volunteer Army, the SAMVA office, to again get into all these problems with all the leadership.

G: I was going to say, you seemed to have been walking [inaudible].

M: That's why I'm here! That's why I'm here.

G: The long knives finally got after you. Is that--?

M: Yes, sure.

G: Well, you're not the first one I've talked to that that has happened to.

M: That's right. Well, it's said that General Abrams--and you can't check this--had put out the instructions "As long as he is in the army, Montague is never going to get promoted again."

G: Are you a paratrooper?

M: No.

G: Well, that's not the explanation then.

M: No. [Inaudible] didn't like what I did in Vietnam and didn't like what I was doing in the volunteer force.

G: I see.

M: And he didn't like my methods, either.

G: Of course, he had come back by what, 1971 or--?

M: Yes.

G: Well, was General DePuy still more or less shielding you if he could by that time?

M: Yes, he tried. He was mad when I retired. He said he was going to take care of me. I said, "You never will."

G: How many years' service did you have when you retired?

M: Well, I retired in 1974. Twenty-seven years.

G: Twenty-seven years.

M: Yes. But then people really didn't like the volunteer army thing.

G: Did Volney Warner work on that, too?

M: No.

G: You never would have made four stars?

M: That's right.

G: Can you tell me just a little bit about the press in Vietnam? Was there a press policy for the guidance of MACV personnel?

M: Oh, sure, and the press policy was in the headquarters, and the information officer dealt with the press. Only with clearance from the information officer could staff people, and Ambassador Komer said, "Disregard that." And he was my leader, so I disregarded that.

And so I helped him with his relations with the press and had a lot of press friends, and my job with the press people was to explain pacification to them, let them know the status of pacification, what our plans were, and to arrange for them to go see good and bad operations, go wherever they wanted.

G: Who were some of the better reporters that you remember from that time?

M: I thought most of them were pretty responsible, and we worked very closely with Johnny Apple [R.W. Apple, Jr.] of the [*New York*]*Times*; Pete Braestrup; Bob [Robert G.] Kaiser now with--I guess he's still with the [*Washington*] *Post*--very capable person; George Triester [?], [inaudible] George from the *New York Times*.

G: Do you know George MacArthur?

M: No, I don't know him.

G: He was the name of the *L. A. Times*. Keyes Beech?

M: Oh, yes. Keyes Beech.

G: Another old timer.

M: I didn't spend as much time with him as with some of those other people.

G: Don Oberdorfer?

M: Don was a very capable guy and took a big interest in pacification.

G: Yes, he was very interested in the Vietnamese side of it.

M: That's right. That's right. The press people that we worked with impressed me as being--first of all, they were very smart. They were energetic in terms of getting to all aspects of the story, the truth of the story, and I didn't have any problems with--yes.

G: Oh, you did? Okay.

M: Yes, most certainly. That's why General Abrams got mad at me.

G: Tell me about that. What happened?

M: Well every once in a while Ambassador Komer protected me. General Abrams and General [Walter] Kerwin, who was the chief of staff really didn't like the Komer operation, I don't think; I know General Kerwin didn't. And they were always criticizing that we weren't properly using the staff system, we were sending in orders directly to CORDS, not through the chief of staff, and General Abrams and General Kerwin--generally General Kerwin--every time we did something like this would come and tell me how I was undermining the operation of the headquarters, and didn't I know better, and all this sort of stuff. And I can even remember one time that General Abrams came to my office and ordered me, he says, "I have told you before through General Kerwin and others that you are not to talk to the press. Now, I am coming to tell you I don't want you ever again to talk to the press!"

G: What had made him mad? Was there a particular story in the--?

M: No. Just stories in general, I guess. I don't ever remember what the particular situation was other than Ambassador Komer was out of the country, so I was unprotected.

G: So what did you do? Did you stop talking to the press?

M: No.

G: What happened next?

M: Well, I didn't get another blast, but I am certain that those kinds of things he remembered when he came up with the statement that he is alleged to have made.

G: Oh, very fine. I've taken a lot of your time this morning.

[Inaudible]

M: We probably didn't get as much flack from the Vietnam war and what we did other than my association with Komer because I think by and large there are two views of that war, and there is something to say for both sides. So people understood that Montague's position and Komer's position that Montague helped formulate was not necessarily a nutty position. It was a reasonable one, and that we presented it in a fair manner and made our case. But the volunteer force effort was something that people really, really got incensed about.

G: What did Vietnam do to the army on balance? What was the effect the Vietnam experience?

M: Well, I think it had a very devastating effect on the army in that you lost

(Interruption)

M: You know, you had the people coming back from Vietnam very dissatisfied with their service there. First of all, it became very dangerous for them, and they didn't seem to be getting anything from their exposure to danger, and I don't think they felt terribly thrilled about their commanders. You didn't have the experience that you developed in World War II where people went up and up and up and stayed there. And they didn't have unit cohesion. You know, they tried to get it, but everybody was just flowing through. The unit was the flag, and the people just moved through it.

In World War II, the big deal was, if you got wounded, you were looking forward to getting back to your buddies in the same unit, and you had great pride in the unit. There wasn't that unit cohesion over there, and so there was nothing that the people could hang their hat on, and they'd come back, and they'd go to some place like division artillery, and

there was sort of no recognition given that there were a lot of really capable veterans in that unit. You just kept going through the same old training cycles, and you still worked around the clock rather than--if I had these really good guys, I had them in the unit. Why couldn't I have relaxed a little bit and turned over much more to the sergeant who really knew what to do? He could train the fire direction crew or do these other things a little bit on their own rather than prescribe training programs and training inspectors coming around and the same old inspector general stuff.

I can always remember going toward Carthen, and General Rogers, Bernie [Bernard] Rogers, was my division commander. He was kind of an egg-head guy, and he was all hot for the "improved soldier morale," and what have you. I said, "This is great!" And so I went down to the division artillery and said, "Boy! I'm really glad they're down here, and my emphasis is on the soldier and recognizing that a lot of people have done a terrific job in Vietnam here and using those people and getting ready to carry out our mission," and, you know, "cut out the Mickey Mouse." So once I told the command sergeant major, "What in the world are we doing having everybody go out to reveille and stand in the cold and then have big police [inaudible]? You don't need those kind of things in this outfit." [Inaudible]. And I said, "Why are we having all these people off on these details? We've got war veterans out there cutting the grass." I said, "That's the post-engineer's job. Knock off cutting the grass." All these great things, and after two weeks went by, I got a call from General Rogers. He says, "Bob, I just took a tour down in division artillery right after reveille this morning, and the area wasn't very well policed." I said, "That's right, sir. We don't police it until later when we have a small group that goes

out end does it. We don't want everybody to do it." He says, "Well, I thought, that was very unmilitary." And he says, "I also noticed that the grass didn't look very good down at the division artillery, not nearly as good as down in the history area." I said, "Well, I just hadn't given much emphasis on the grass; I thought that we weren't here to cut grass. That's Colonel Walsh's job. He's the post engineer." He says, "Well, I just don't like it down there. I want you to get that place straightened out!"

G: That's pretty clear.

M: They're nuts! Absolutely ludicrous! And then we got in a big kick about energy. Now, I can remember we had fire lights, and you were going to save energy by turning off the fire lights in accordance with a time schedule which was going to be published by the post engineer and the daily bulletin. And I got a rocket from General Rogers. He says, "I got this report here that the firelights are constantly on down at the division artillery area. Why can't you get those fire lights off?" I said, "You know how those things"--I didn't say it to him. I said, "You know how those goddamned guys have done that? They're smart. They took the light bulbs out of the damn fire lights." And I said, "I'm not going to do that. Fire lights are there for a purpose, and that's to protect the soldiers. Maybe it's dumb, but they're there on each of the stairwells and what have you, and I'm not going to do that. On the other hand, I'm not going to spend a hell of a lot of time screwing around with fire lights." And so I was constantly getting bombarded from division headquarters about fire lights. You know, when we had a chance to go to the volunteer force, then I said, "Gee, that's great! Now we have a chance to change the character of the army and really make it a

modern force and get rid of all this crap." It bothers officers and sergeants to spend most of your time on all these non-things.

G: Did you have the British regimental system at all in mind when you--

M: Yes. We tried to introduce that early in the volunteer force, and you got so much flack from the goddamned army staff. General Kerwin by that time was the deputy chief of staff for personnel. He didn't like me. I didn't dislike General Kerwin. I just didn't agree with him, and we were getting out--I was SAMVA so here I was again agent for the chief of staff, but I was smart enough that when we set up SAMVA, I said, "That won't get you what you want. You've got to have other source of power." And so we were also an office to the secretary of the army. So, if we couldn't get something done through the staff, we had a weekly meeting without the chief of staff with the secretary of the army, without General Kerwin. That was not very smart, but the thing was to get things done, and you had to jam the volunteer army changes through the deputy chief of staff for personnel because there's no just saying, "Yes, [inaudible]." The navy would have done it after "appropriate coordination with the staff." I think the thing that made the people madder in the army than anything was that I made a big campaign of it. I don't know why I made a big campaign; I just liked it. I said, "Army regulations were guidelines. As long as you didn't violate any aspect of the army regulations that were written in because of law, then you should use your best judgment." And so, then I'd make speeches around like that, and we had five experimental posts called "VOAR posts, volunteer army posts, and we put out a big construction without any coordination for those posts to come in and tell us any regulation that they wanted to waive, to set aside. We got piles of them in. And so I sent

them out to the staff who were in the Pentagon--and everybody had like one week to respond whether that was prohibited by law or not; didn't want to hear any other complaint. I didn't want to hear that they're going to stick it, keep it there. They said, "Which of these regulations cannot be waived because of law?" And then we had a big meeting at staff. We got guys from DESOPS [Description of Operations], DESLOG [Description of Logistics?], CLL [Chief of Legislative Liaison?], judge advocate and all of these people, and you could make your case as to whether you think--one more last chance--whether you saw fit not to allow the things to be waived. And we listened, and we went back and put out instructions they were waived except in a few cases.

G: I can see where that would have created a strain. What's your impression of the relative success or failure of the volunteer army?

M: Well, I think it's terrifically successful, and the opinions are mixed, but I'm just telling you I think they're terrifically successful. Certainly morale is higher, retention is better, the quality--I mean everybody said the volunteer force, "You're going to get all these dumb heads!" The quality is way up recruits. I mean, you get almost zero non-high school graduates now. Every non-high school graduate has to be categorized 3-A or above. Under the draft, you required in the army 24% Mental Group 4; had to take them on law; it's in the law. People forget that. You get what? 3 or 4% Mental Group 4's, now? None of them are Mental Group 4-C. Every mental Group 4 guy or girl has to be a high school graduate.

G: I guess the percentage of juvenile delinquents has gone down, too, since the judges don't order them off into the army.

M: That's right. Well, we created a--we said to them, "We aren't going to take anybody in under disciplinary waivers."

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II

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